



# Chair and Prize Poem,

Porthcawl Annual Eisteddfod, 1918,

## *“The Welsh at Mametz Wood”*

BY

ARTHUR GEORGE, B.A.,

Author of “Alun and other Poems.”



*Extracts from Adjudication :—*

“ This competitor writes good and popular poetry, the kind of poetry for a subject like this, and the kind of poetry that will be read by the people. The picture is living and forceful. . . . There is also a mastery of details, and the whole effort brings out a very stirring satisfying effect.”

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# The Welsh at Mametz Wood,

July 7th, 8th, 9th 10th, 1916.

The summer morn dismissed the stars, and in its light we stood,  
With Mametz village in the rear—in front was Mametz wood.  
We watched the silver mists disperse, we saw the poplars rise  
Like marshalled sentinels to guard the sylvan paradise,  
Where laughing Innocence and Love once heard the pipes of  
Peace,

And garlands wove in fairy glades fanned by the playful breeze.  
These fleeting visions vanished when the foemen's shrieking  
shell

Forewarned us that our footsteps trod the borderland of Hell.  
Then nature seemed in herb and flow'r, in tree, in light and air,  
Resentful that the bestial Hun should foul a scene so fair.  
The Prussian Python's lustful eyes with all its reptile brood,  
Glared at us from the waving fringe and aisles of Mametz Wood.  
But like the Sainted Knight of old who slew the dragon, we  
Were strong in valiant faith and dared the Teuton devilry.  
Our souls aglow with Love of Right and steeled with Hate of  
Wrong

Could not be pierced by coward fear but were divinely strong.  
One fierce constraining spirit in our Cymric ranks prevailed—  
The spirit that makes light of death when Justice is assailed,  
The spirit that defied the foe in our illustrious sires,  
Who bore the flame of Liberty across our rugged shires.  
The Cardiff men, the London Welsh, the men of Swansea town,  
The Monmouth men, Carmarthen men, and men from dale  
and down,

In gallant comradeship were one, crusaders all were they,  
The magnet of a holy cause had drawn them to the fray.  
A righteous anger raged within our spirits as we stood  
Expectant of the word to storm the foe in Mametz Wood.  
Ill-timed, alas, that fateful word along our trenches sped,  
The Cardiff men obedient charged towards the "Hammer  
Head."\*

But in the realm of death between, in No Man's Land they fell,  
No bird could wing its passage through that storm of shot and  
shell.

We cursed the triumph of the foe, we cursed with every breath  
The reckless word that blindly sent such gallant men to death.  
We cursed our impotence to save the valiant dwindling few  
That calmly faced the fiery hail that from the woodland flew.

\*South-eastern part of the Wood.

In spite of hope forlorn they charged as only heroes could,  
'Tis my belief their spirits fought the foe in Mametz Wood.  
That woful day went wailing down behind a dismal cloud,  
Then night in raven raiment came and spread a sable shroud  
Across the world, and hid the stars, and in the dark we shed  
The silent tears of sorrow for our Cardiff comrades dead.  
'Tis he who for a comrade weeps will for a comrade die,  
And tears are not inglorious in a gallant warrior's eye.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another sunset came, and still we kept the foe at bay,  
Whilst vengeance potent in our hearts prepared us for the fray.  
The ninth day of July we saw sink in the purple west,  
And in its wake our fancy flew to those we loved the best.  
Our captive spirits beat their wings against their mortal bars,  
And longed to seek the hills of Wales beneath the midnight stars.  
Delirious dreams of anxious homes were ours as there we stood  
With heavy eyelids startled by the Hell in Mametz Wood.  
The frequent terrors of the hour could never make us blench  
Nor still Devotion's holy voice along our battered trench.  
And many a prayer and plaintive hymn, despite the murd'rous  
flight

Of Hunnish shells, soared heavenward o'er our parapets that  
night.

Then suddenly a bustling sound along our lines was heard,  
It came towards us like the flight of some low flying bird.  
It was the whispered order and no word was slurred nor lost,  
"At early dawn attack the wood, and win at any cost!"  
Loud were our heart beats when we knew what meant the  
stern command,

No epic heroes ever had a mightier task in hand.

With every shell that sought our ranks our teeth were firmer  
set,

And with a will of steel we fixed the steely bayonet.

Though taught in youth to follow Peace and worship Christ—  
not Mars,

We were the tempered spearpoint in the greatest of all wars.  
It is our faith that He who reigns supreme by righteous laws,  
Inspires the warriors fighting for a great and righteous cause.  
The visions of those waiting hours lit in our hearts a fire  
Of holy wrath that seemed at one with Heaven's avenging ire.  
We saw the plains of Belgium strewn with Belgium guiltless  
dead—

Her virgins raped, her temples fouled, her weeping children led  
To bondage by her bestial foes, her cities desolate,—

And supplicating Heaven we cried: "Save Wales from  
Belgium's fate."

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Then the expected tumult fell upon our wakeful ears,  
Its echoes scared the distant dawn and shook the starry spheres.  
Six hundred British guns sent forth their challenge to the Hun,  
Their epic voices woke the world long ere the rising sun.  
To us it was a fearful joy to hear their mighty pean,  
And hear the loud avenging shells burst in the woodland green.  
That clamorous hour thrilled our frames and held us by the  
throat,

When we beheld its sands run out, tense feeling cancelled  
thought.

"Advance!" our gallant leaders cried—then we to danger blind  
Swept onward like the prairie fire fanned by a furious wind.  
Mighty in faith and will were we—sons of our Spartan shires,  
We sang of victory amidst the foeman's barrage fires.

The Gwentians and the London Welsh, our world-famed  
Fusiliers,

Morganwg men, Carmarthen men, in battle were compeers.  
How Valour lived in No Man's Land no mortal tongue can tell,  
Its dread dividing space appeared in hostile league with Hell.  
We dared its flames and terrors but our souls were stabbed  
by pain,

When in the final rush, alas, we trampled on our slain.  
Their spirits marched along with us, and in our ranks unseen  
They fought against the grey-clad fiends within the woodland  
green.

We slew the gunners at their guns, and wished that we could  
slay

With one fell stroke the Frightfulness that rends mankind  
to-day.

The champions of the Tyrant's throne had not the will to face  
The glitter of our vengeful steel, and courage of our race.  
How oft Morganwg's miners laid with swift and mortal thrust,  
The tow'ring guardian arrogance of Prussia in the dust.

We fought among the tortured trees, unconscious of the price  
We paid for Right and Liberty in our great Sacrifice.

In its meridian glory shone true martial glory when  
That woodland citadel was stormed and won by Cymru's men.  
Bloodstained, dishevelled, battered, worn, we stood beneath  
the stars

Victorious o'er a cruel foe that worships Thor and Mars;  
And in a vision of the night I saw a gleaming cross  
Glide westward o'er the heaven's expanse, a symbol of our loss.  
Methought I heard a voice proclaim, "God crowns with  
sovereign good,

The sacrifice and triumph of the Welsh at Mametz Wood."

